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Twenty-seventh special session

Summaries of round tables on the theme "Renewal of commitment and future action for children in the next decade"

Round table 2

Thursday, 9 May 2002 (morning)

Co-Chairs: Mrs. Tarja **Halonen**, President of the Republic of Finland
Mr. Vicente **Fox**, President of the United Mexican States

"*I am the voice of all the children who have suffered throughout the world ... you who are members of mankind — why have you let these things happen?*"
Marie-Claire Umuhoza, Rwanda

"*Give us, your children, a good today. We will, in turn, give you a good tomorrow.*"
Toukir Ahmed, Bangladesh

1. The importance of listening to children and young people in a true inter-generational dialogue was one of the major themes of this round table. Today, they made their voices heard. In addition to Marie-Claire Umuhoza and Toukir Ahmed, the child delegates who opened the meeting, other young delegates told us of their concerns.

2. Marie-Claire eloquently described the devastating effects of violence on her family and her country, telling us that her parents had been killed and she and her three sisters had been forced to flee. "I am here without a father, a mother ... no one to call me 'my child'. Call me your daughter. I need love."

3. Toukir spoke of the need to combat exploitation and abuse in a world where there was violence and cruelty, conflict and war, and where children required special attention, especially against child trafficking and child abuse.

4. The other young delegates stressed the importance of real participation by children and young people, as well as the rights of refugee children, girls and indigenous children. One said that the issue of participation was not taken seriously in the outcome document. They reminded us that our biggest challenge is what to do when we go home, to make our words a reality.

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5. Equality was a major theme of the morning's discussion. Every child must have an equal opportunity to grow and develop, beginning with a safe delivery and access to medical care and education. Children in vulnerable groups, including refugees, ethnic minorities, immigrants, indigenous children and disabled children, need special care and attention. Not enough is being done for girls' education. The importance of reconfirming rights was also stressed; education, not working and access to reproductive health services are rights, not privileges, according to one participant.

6. Many participants stressed the importance of living up to existing international commitments and not going backwards. One said, "this forum cannot accept that children are negotiable". Another underlined the need for leadership and high-level participation from developed and developing countries at events like the special session.

7. The issue of adequate resources was raised repeatedly. It was said that only five countries have met the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to development assistance, and that the rich world has to give more, but it has to be used more effectively. There must be a genuine partnership between donors and programme countries and, in addition to bilateral assistance programmes, there must be a global plan for children. Within countries, more resources must be allocated to children. Many speakers appealed for debt relief in favour of children and for fair access to markets.

8. Many speakers stressed the special needs of Africa, which had been affected by poverty, conflict and disease. Malaria affected Africa more than any other continent, and Africa was especially devastated by HIV/AIDS. The Executive Director of UNAIDS, Peter Piot, said that, in southern Africa, a 15-year-old boy today has a 60 per cent chance of contracting HIV and subsequently dying of AIDS. He also said that AIDS prevention and care must be integrated into all development, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, stating that "AIDS has to be part of everything we do because it is part of life". A number of speakers said that adolescents must not be denied their rights to reproductive health services in the face of this disease.

9. Following the statement by Marie-Claire, many participants spoke of the harm done to children by conflict and war. It was stressed that there must be early warning systems, and that the United Nations has a role in preventing conflict. In addition to immediate relief, children affected by conflict required longer-term assistance and psychosocial care from specially trained teachers and caregivers, even after the media and the public had lost interest. In such situations, children must be asked about their views and feelings. One participant said that conflict often resulted in violations of children's right to health because of lack of access to affected areas. Another reminded the round table that man-made disasters were equally damaging to children's health and well-being.

10. The importance of education, especially for girls, was underlined by many speakers. The Deputy Director-General for Education of UNESCO, John Daniel, spoke on behalf of the members of the Education for All consortium, outlining progress made in terms of national plans and international developments like the Monterrey Consensus and increased funding for education from the World Bank.

11. The exploitation of children, child trafficking and hazardous child labour were condemned by many speakers. Governments were urged to ratify the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, in order to ensure accountability for these crimes. The sexual abuse of children, which was a problem all over the world, required greater cooperation with the police. The Director-General of the International Labour Organization, Juan Somavia, said that 180 million children are involved in the worst forms of child labour. Many of them work because their parents are unable to earn enough. He said that today's global economy is not generating the jobs that their parents require in order to support their families, so that children are forced to work.

12. Many speakers outlined measures their countries are taking to protect children's rights, including the designation of ombudspersons for children, the formation of children's parliaments and the development of national plans of action. Countries are also enacting national legislation and reforming juvenile justice systems to conform to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The latter are especially relevant in the light of new problems that have emerged, including violence in schools, drug addiction and drug trafficking. Because children require the love and affection of a family, many countries are moving away from institutions and working with communities and non-governmental organizations to support foster families for orphans and other children without families.

13. The importance of regional and international cooperation was stressed by several participants, who have organized networks and working groups and are sharing information, for example to combat child trafficking and child pornography. This type of cooperation is also important for collecting data on children for monitoring and follow-up to international conferences like the special session. Participants said that follow-up to the special session should not result in more bureaucracy, but in real results. Sharing of best practices by the United Nations system would help to accelerate progress.

14. Two common threads of the debate were the need to generate resources, and that economic development went hand in hand with human development. The special session on children was part of a "cycle of virtue" which included the International Conference on Financing for Development, recently held at Monterrey, Mexico, and the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held at Johannesburg, South Africa, later this year. The overriding priority of this cycle was children and young people. The world must respond to the challenges facing young people and move from commitments to action.